Listing of the Claims:

1. - 84.   (Canceled).

85.   (New)   A method of answering incoming telephone calls, the method comprising:

answering an incoming call on the telephone line from a first calling party;

playing a general outgoing message to the first calling party over the telephone line;

receiving from the first calling party over the telephone line a code selected from at least two codes, each code corresponding to a storage location selected from at least two storage locations;

responsive to receipt of the code from the first calling party over the telephone line, playing to the first calling party over the telephone line at least a portion of a message thread, the message thread comprising at least a portion of the contents of a selected storage location corresponding to the code received from the first calling party over the telephone line;

providing to the first calling party an option to delete at least a portion of the message thread;

receiving a first incoming message from the first calling party over the telephone line;

appending at least a portion of the first incoming message to the message thread;

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answering an incoming call on the telephone line from a second calling party;

playing a general outgoing message to the second calling party over the telephone line;

receiving from the second calling party the code corresponding to the selected storage location;

responsive to receipt of the code from the second calling party over the telephone line, playing to the second calling party over the telephone line at least a portion of the message thread;

providing to the second calling party an option to delete at least a portion of the message thread;

receiving a second incoming message from the second calling party over the telephone line; and

appending at least a portion of the second incoming message to the second message thread.

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86. (New)   The method as recited in claim 85 further comprising the step of recording, in a default incoming message storage location, an incoming message from a calling party received over the telephone line, the recording occurring in response to expiration of a predetermined period of time without receipt on the telephone line of a code from that calling party.

87. (New)   The method as recited in claim 85 further comprising the step of storing the message thread including a special outgoing message and at least one incoming message from at least one calling party received on the telephone line.

88. (New)   The method as recited in claim 85 wherein the message thread includes at least one deleted message and at least one stored message.

89. (New)   The method as recited in claim 85 wherein a calling party is provided the option of deleting the entire contents of the storage location selected by that calling party.

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90. (New)   The method as recited in claim 85 further comprising the step of playing, subsequent to playing a general outgoing message to a calling party on the telephone line, a tone to a calling party on the telephone line if a message has been stored in a storage location.

91. (New)   The method as recited in claim 85 further comprising the step of deleting the entire message thread by at least one of the first and second calling parties.

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92.   (New)   A method of answering incoming telephone calls, the method comprising:

answering an incoming call on the telephone line from a first calling party;

playing a general outgoing message to the first calling party over the telephone line;

receiving from the first calling party over the telephone line a code selected from at least two codes, each code corresponding to a storage location selected from at least two storage locations;

responsive to receipt of the code from the first calling party over the telephone line, playing to the first calling party over the telephone line at least a portion of a message thread, the message thread comprising at least one message stored in a selected storage location, the selected storage location corresponding to the code received from the first calling party over the telephone line;

deleting at least one message from the message thread;

receiving a first incoming message from the first calling party over the telephone line;

appending the first incoming message to the message thread stored in the storage location corresponding to the code received from the first calling party over the telephone line;

answering an incoming call on the telephone line from a second calling party;

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playing a general outgoing message to the second calling party over the telephone line;

receiving from the second calling party the code corresponding to the selected storage location;

responsive to receipt of the code from the second calling party over the telephone line, playing to the second calling party over the telephone line at least a portion of the message thread;

deleting at least one message from the message thread;

receiving a second incoming message from the second calling party over the telephone line; and

appending the second incoming message to the message thread.

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93. (New)   The method as recited in claim 92 further comprising the step of recording, responsive to expiration of a predetermined period of time without receipt on the telephone line of a code from a calling party, an incoming message from the calling party received on the telephone line in a default incoming message storage location.

94. (New)   The method as recited in claim 92 further comprising the step of storing the message thread including a special outgoing message and at least one incoming message from at least one calling party received on the telephone line.

95. (New)   The method as recited in claim 92 wherein the message thread includes at least one deleted message and at least one stored message.

96. (New)   The method as recited in claim 92 wherein a calling party is provided the option of deleting the entire contents of the storage location selected by that calling party.

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97. (New)   The method as recited in claim 92 further
comprising the step of playing, subsequent to playing a general
outgoing message to a calling party on the telephone line, a tone
to a calling party on the telephone line if a message has been
stored in a storage location.

98. (New)   The method as recited in claim 92 further
comprising the step of deleting the entire message thread by at
least one of the first and second calling parties.

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99. (New)   An apparatus for answering incoming telephone
calls, the apparatus comprising:

a means for answering an incoming call on the telephone line
from a first calling party;

a means for playing a general outgoing message to the first
calling party over the telephone line;

a means for receiving from the first calling party over the
telephone line a code selected from at least two codes, each code
corresponding to a specific storage location selected from at least
two storage locations;

a means for playing to the first calling party over the
telephone line, responsive to receipt of the code from the first
calling party over the telephone line, at least a portion of a
message thread, the message thread comprising at least a portion of
the contents of a selected storage location, the selected storage
location corresponding to the code received from the first calling
party over the telephone line;

a means for receiving a first incoming message from the first
calling party over the telephone line;

a means for providing to the first calling party an option to
delete at least a portion of the message thread;

a means for appending at least a portion of the first incoming
message to the message thread stored in the storage location

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corresponding to the code received from the first calling party over the telephone line;

a means for answering an incoming call on the telephone line from a second calling party;

a means for playing a general outgoing message to the second calling party over the telephone line;

a means for receiving from the second calling party the code corresponding to the selected storage location;

a means for playing to the second calling party over the telephone line, responsive to receipt of the code from the second calling party over the telephone line, at least a portion of the message thread;

a means for providing to the second calling party an option to delete at least a portion of the message thread;

a means for receiving a second incoming message from the second calling party over the telephone line; and

a means for appending at least a portion of the second incoming message to the message thread.

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100. (New)   The apparatus as recited in claim 99 further comprising means for recording, responsive to expiration of a predetermined period of time without receipt on the telephone line of a code from a calling party, an incoming message from that calling party and a means for storing the incoming message in a default incoming message storage location.

101. (New)   The apparatus as recited in claim 99 wherein the message thread comprises at least two messages.

102. (New)   The apparatus as recited in claim 99 wherein the message thread comprises a special outgoing message and at least one incoming message.

103. (New)   The apparatus as recited in claim 99 further comprising means for playing a tone to a calling party on the telephone line if a message has been stored in a storage location.

104. (New)   The apparatus as recited in claim 99 wherein the message thread comprises at least one stored message and at least one deleted message.

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105. (New)   An apparatus for answering incoming telephone calls, the apparatus comprising:

a means for answering an incoming call on the telephone line from a first calling party;

a means for playing a general outgoing message to the first calling party over the telephone line;

a means for receiving from the first calling party over the telephone line a code selected from at least two codes, each code corresponding to a specific storage location selected from at least two storage locations;

a means for playing to the first calling party over the telephone line, responsive to receipt of the code from the first calling party over the telephone line, at least a portion of a message thread, the message thread comprising at least one message stored in a selected storage location, the selected storage location corresponding to the code received from the first calling party over the telephone line;

a means for receiving a first incoming message from the first calling party over the telephone line;

a means for deleting at least one message from the message thread;

a means for appending the first incoming message to the message thread stored in the storage location corresponding to the code received from the first calling party over the telephone line;

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a means for answering an incoming call on the telephone line from a second calling party;

a means for playing a general outgoing message to the second calling party over the telephone line;

a means for receiving from the second calling party the code corresponding to the selected storage location;

a means for playing to the second calling party over the telephone line, responsive to receipt of the code from the second calling party over the telephone line, at least a portion of the message thread;

a means for deleting at least one message from the message thread; and

a means for appending the second incoming message to the message thread.

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106. (New)   The apparatus as recited in claim 105 further comprising means for recording, responsive to expiration of a predetermined period of time without receipt on the telephone line of a code from a calling party, an incoming message from that calling party and a means for storing the incoming message in a default incoming message storage location.

107. (New)   The apparatus as recited in claim 105 wherein the message thread comprises at least two messages.

108. (New)   The apparatus as recited in claim 105 wherein the message thread comprises a special outgoing message and at least one incoming message.

109. (New)   The apparatus as recited in claim 105 further comprising means for playing a tone to a calling party on the telephone line if a message has been stored in a storage location.

110. (New)   The apparatus as recited in claim 105 wherein the message thread comprises at least one deleted message and at least one stored message.

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